

GRAMMAR AND INTERPRETATION

Natalia Anatolyevna Besedina*, Yelena Viktorovna Shemaeva,
Irina Valentinovna Borisovskaya, Natalia Viktorovna Zimovets

Belgorod State University, Belgorod (RUSSIA)

*Corresponding author: NBesedina@bsu.edu.ru

DOI: 10.7813/jll.2015/6-2/33

Received: 04 Jan, 2015

Accepted: 27 Feb, 2015

ABSTRACT

An important objective of this paper is to present grammar in an interpretative perspective. The authors demonstrate the usefulness of a cognitive approach by showing mechanisms of interaction between conceptual and linguistic units that underlie the semantics of lexicalized plural forms in English and German. In attempting to provide an account of this issue the authors address theories of cognitive semantics, conceptual derivation, morphological representation and linguistic interpretation worked out within the framework of cognitive linguistics by Russian and foreign scientists. The process of lexicalization is modeled relying on the basic assumptions of the above mentioned theories. Mechanisms and factors influencing the formation of new senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns are singled out. Finally the authors lay special emphasis on the fact that knowledge conveyed by lexical units is the basis for formation of new concepts and conceptual structures which is provided by the interpretive activity of human thought.

Key words: grammar, English, German, lexicalization, noun, conceptual derivation, identifying interpretation

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present article is to provide a cognitive explanation for the linguistic phenomenon of lexicalization by analyzing conceptual processes and cognitive mechanisms that determine acquiring of new meanings by plural nouns. First we will review some general issues regarding the process of lexicalization and then discuss the major points that provide the cornerstones for our research.

The term "lexicalization" is used to describe a wide range of linguistic phenomena implying the conversion of a language element or a combination of elements into a separate lexical unit [1]. Lexicalization of plural nouns is considered to be a special case of lexicalization defined as semantic isolation of plural forms. Within the framework of traditional linguistics lexicalization is interpreted as the result of interaction between lexical and grammatical meanings of a word when plural nouns no longer refer to a simple multitude of similar objects, that is they denote another class of objects. Another important observation which seems to be relevant in this respect is the loss of countability by lexicalized plural nouns. Moreover, it is agreed that lexicalization can be complete and stable (when plural nouns acquire new meanings and become separate words) or incomplete and unstable (when lexicalized plural nouns preserve the meaning of plurality).

Within cognitive linguistics tradition lexicalization of plural nouns has often been viewed in terms of cognitive processes resulting in formation of new cognitive structures in human mind [2]. In addition, it is stated that native speakers perceive multitude of objects depending on the type of the object and the mode of its usage [3]. We start by considering the fundamental assumptions upon which our research model rests.

As it is widely assumed in cognitive linguistics, it is a concept that determines the semantics of linguistic units used for its indexing [4]. Accordingly, any changes of meaning structure are caused by changes in the corresponding conceptual structure. Thus, the multilevel theory of meaning, where the conceptual and the linguistic levels of knowledge representation are differentiated [5], is of fundamental importance to the analysis of language meanings formation.

In addition, concepts and conceptual structures are capable of interacting. This interaction results in formation of new conceptual structures that become a part of the conceptual system. In other words, interaction of concepts is the cognitive basis of many language products [6]. The process of interaction of concepts that underlies lexicalization of plural nouns is that of conceptual derivation defined as a mental process aimed at forming of new sense as a result of a certain way of interpreting the knowledge, which was already verbalized. From this definition it follows that conceptual derivation is closely connected with linguistic interpretation. Boldyrev defines linguistic interpretation as a cognitive process of world representation by means of language semantics which involves both conceptualization and categorization of objects and events and their interconnections [7]. In our approach linguistic interpretation implies a special kind of cognitive activity based on mechanisms of conceptual derivation, whereas conceptual derivation presupposes the development of the content of the primary concepts and conceptual structures as a result of the establishment of the corresponding interconceptual connections. With the above generalities in mind some issues regarding the process of lexicalization of plural nouns will be addressed further.

2. METHOD

Adopting a fresh perspective we use conceptual analysis and cognitive modeling as commonly used methods of cognitive research in linguistics. Conceptual analysis is aimed at detecting of conceptual characteristics by means of meanings of linguistic units representing the corresponding concept. Cognitive modeling enables to describe formation of semantics of linguistic units and explain cognitive mechanisms underlying different processes in language. Moreover, cognitive modeling leads to the understanding of concrete senses formation in the process of communication.

3. MAIN PART

Within the framework of our approach lexicalization of plural nouns is argued to be treated as a linguistic process based on mechanisms of conceptual derivation and identifying interpretation as a result of which a plural noun encodes a new fragment of knowledge in a certain conceptual configuration. Identifying interpretation ensures the formation of sense on the basis of secondary nomination which involves mastering of new knowledge in a conceptual projection fixed by a lexicalized plural noun.

Our hypothesis is that conceptual derivation that underlies lexicalization of plural nouns is carried out according to different models by means of certain cognitive mechanisms.

Next the cognitive mechanisms of lexicalization of plural nouns will be examined in detail. We suggest that the cognitive mechanisms of lexicalization of plural nouns are those of conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor, profiling, configuring and defocusing. However, their role in the process of forming new senses is different. Conceptual metonymy and conceptual metaphor determine the type of a lexicalization model; cognitive mechanisms of profiling, configuring and defocusing complement them in the functioning of cognitive models.

Conceptual metonymy involves substitution of one element of a conceptual structure by another [8]. In the broad sense, it is the model of conceptualization of the world and representation of knowledge about the world in human mind. Conceptual metaphor presupposes structuring of one concept in terms of another [9]. Moreover, it is considered to be the mechanism of interpretation of the world and knowledge about it.

The cognitive mechanism of profiling with regard to lexicalization of plural nouns is that of bringing forward certain conceptual characteristics of a concept verbalized by a singular form of a noun. Configuring is a process of giving form to conceptual content by means of different combinations of conceptual characteristics. Finally, the cognitive mechanism of defocusing is a mental process aimed at removing of certain properties of objects or situations from the focus of attention.

As has been previously observed, cognitive mechanisms of metonymy and metaphor determine the type of a lexicalization model. In accordance with this, we suggest that there are two major types of lexicalization models: identifying metonymical model and identifying metaphorical model. The formation of senses on the basis of these models follows the mechanisms of conceptual derivation and identifying interpretation. In addition, this process is determined by some linguistic factors. The semantic factor presupposes taking into account the semantics of a singular noun and determines the stages of lexicalization. The contextual factor is connected with the context of the whole sentence [10].

Having analyzed linguistic material, we have established that identifying metonymical models are predominant. In English and German lexicalization of plural nouns is carried out according to the following metonymical models: "part – whole" (*drop – drops, die Nagel – die Nageln*), "quality – object" (*colour – colours, green – greens, das Altertum – die Altertümer, das Wert – die Werte*), "material – product made of this material" (*tweed – tweeds, das Papier – die Papiere*), "quality – person" (*authority – authorities, die Kraft – die Kräfte*), "action – event" (*talk – talks, der Schlag – die Schläge*), "action – result" (*manufacture – manufactures, die Phantasie – die Phantasien*), "effect – cause" (*woe – woes, das Weh – die Wehen, das Licht – die Lichter*), "substance – space" (*water – waters, das Wasser – die Wasser*), "feeling – mode of expressing feeling" (*honour – honours, das Interesse – die Interessen*). Further one of the most frequent models "part – whole" will be examined in detail.

The model "part – whole" can be illustrated by the following examples in English: *bead – beads, drop – drops, feature – features, figure – figures, thread – threads, verse – verses, wave – waves, wheel – wheels*; in German: *das Brett – die Bretter, die Nagel – die Nageln, die Traube – die Trauben*. The semantics of such nouns presupposes the formation of plural forms denoting simple plurality of similar objects or phenomena. However, plural nouns of this group are capable of acquiring separate lexical meanings different from the meaning of simple plurality of similar objects or phenomena, that is they can undergo lexicalization. Now let's consider the process of meaning-construction of lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** using the contexts given below:

He'd returned with a bauble – some expensive beads.

Denn nicht jeder Afrikaner besitzt eine eigene Skiausrüstung. Die Bretter sehen schon ziemlich mitgenommen aus; es handelt sich um gebrauchte Modelle, die man en gros in Kitzbühel erstehen konnte.

In order to find out the content of the concepts verbalized by singular forms of nouns **bead** and **das Brett** let us analyze their definitions:

bead – a small piece of hard material with a hole through it used for putting together with others on a string, or for sewing onto material.

das Brett – langes, flaches Stück Holz, das von einem Baumstamm der Länge nach abgeschnitten worden ist.

The given definitions suggest that the concepts represented by the nouns **bead** and **das Brett** possess the conceptual characteristic "a part of an object".

Lexicalized plural forms of these nouns have the following definitions:

beads – a string of beads worn around the neck.

die Bretter – Schneeschuhe (schmales, längliches, elastisches, vorn in eine aufgebogene Spitze auslaufendes Brett aus Holz, Kunststoff oder Metall, das man am Schuh befestigt, um sich mit seiner Hilfe, ohne einzusinken, über den Schnee fortzubewegen).

Judging by the given definitions the concepts verbalized by the nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** possess the conceptual characteristic "an object".

Here we come to the description of the process of forming senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter**. The process undergoes several stages. On the first stage in the process of morphological representation the sense "discrete plurality" expressed by ordinary plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** is formed. The semantics of these forms is determined by the morphological concept NUMBER that possesses the conceptual characteristic "plurality" and the conceptual characteristic "a part of an object" inherited from the concepts represented by singular forms of nouns **bead** and **das Brett**.

On the next stage in the course of conceptual derivation in the content of the concepts represented by ordinary plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** the conceptual characteristic "a part of an object" inherited from the concepts represented by singular forms of nouns **bead** and **das Brett** is activated. Next the activated conceptual characteristic "a part of an object" is profiled, that is it is put in the focus of attention. By means of the cognitive mechanism of metonymy the activated and profiled characteristic "a part of an object" is replaced by the related characteristic "an object". Configuring of the conceptual content on the basis of combination of the replacing conceptual characteristic "an object" and characteristic "plurality" leads

to the formation of concepts of new configuration that determine the semantics of lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter**.

The formation of new senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** takes place on the sentence-utterance level in the course of identifying interpretation under the influence of the contextual factor. In the examples above the mechanism of direct nomination (*a bauble – some expensive beads, eine eigene Skiausrüstung – Die Bretter*) enables to interpret the senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** as “a string of beads (a piece of jewellery)” and “skis”.

As a result of conceptual derivation lexicalized plural nouns **beads** and **die Bretter** fix a new fragment of knowledge (about singular objects composed of a number of parts) in a certain configuration.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis presented here demonstrates that on the conceptual level lexicalization of plural nouns is ensured by the processes of conceptual derivation and identifying interpretation. Lexicalization is carried out according to identifying metonymical and metaphorical models by means of cognitive mechanisms of metonymy, metaphor, profiling, configuring and defocusing. The process of formation of senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns is based on the interaction of conceptual and linguistic units and linguistic factors: the semantic factor and the contextual one. Our general point is that the sort of approach to lexicalization we sketch offers the basis for more coherent, learnable presentation of this hitherto seemingly arbitrary aspect of the English and German grammar.

5. RESULTS

In this article we have presented a cognitive overview of lexicalization of plural nouns. In our approach we have laid special emphasis on the fact that the possibility for plural nouns to acquire their own lexical meanings is provided by the interpretative activity of human thought. This research has allowed us to model the process of lexicalization of plural nouns as a whole and the knowledge structures that determine formation of senses expressed by lexicalized plural nouns in the discourse. The findings presented have significant implications for ongoing and future research on the linguistic semantics of number and the relationship between grammar and lexicon.

REFERENCES

1. Yartseva, V., 2000. Yazykoznanie. Bolshoi Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar. Bolshaya Rossiiskaya Entsiklopediya, pp: 685. (In Russian).
2. Klepikova, T., 2011. Linguistic Coding of Epistemic Vigilance. In the Proceedings of the Third Conference of the Scandinavian Association for Language and Cognition, pp: 74-75.
3. Rakhilina, E., 2000. Kognitivnyi Analiz Predmetnykh Imyon: Semantika i Sochetaniya. Russkie Slovari, pp: 416. (In Russian).
4. Boldyrev, N., 2014. Kognitivnaya Semantika. Izdatelskii dom TGU, pp: 236. (In Russian).
5. Magirovskaya, O., 2010. Evaluation and Appraisal in Knowledge Interpretation. In the Proceedings of the 3-rd UK Cognitive Linguistics Conference: Language, Mind and Reality, pp: 134.
6. Goldberg, V., 2003. Leksika Sovremennogo Angliyskogo Yazyka v Svete Lingvisticheskikh Paradigm: Metody Issledovaniya. Izdatelstvo TGU, pp: 92. (In Russian).
7. Boldyrev, N., 2011. A Cognitive View of Linguistic Interpretation. In the Proceedings of the Third Conference of the Scandinavian Association for Language and Cognition, pp: 39-40.
8. Lakoff, G., 1987. Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind. The University of Chicago Press, pp: 614.
9. Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson, 2003. Metaphors We Live by. The University of Chicago Press, pp: 256.
10. Besedina, N., S. Stepanenko, O. Fedotova and Y. Sherstyukova, 2012. Morphology of Number in English: a Cognitive Perspective. Journal of Language and Literature, 5(3): 83-88.